

# Benefits Matters

An update on benefits for people living and working in Lambeth



Issue 8  
December 2009



## Introduction

Welcome to the 8<sup>th</sup> issue of Benefits Matters. This information bulletin is designed to keep you up to date with:

- The latest news in benefits including what's happening in Lambeth
- Information about national policy development
- Links to useful websites and other useful resources

You will find information on:

- Latest update on the campaign
- Training Opportunities
- New on-line developments and improved services
- Benefit changes update

## Campaign updates...



## Nine million and climbing

The Campaign continues to achieve excellent results and has now raised more than £9 million in extra benefits for Lambeth residents. The Every Pound Counts campaign targets residents who are aged 60 or over, or those who are ill or disabled, including children, and the carers of these people.

55% of those contacting our service achieve some level of income maximisation. More than half of this additional income has been raised by helping ill or disabled adults and older people to claim disability benefits. The average income gain for people helped is now over £5,000 per year.

If you would like to refer someone for welfare benefits advice, contact Every Pound Counts on 020 7926 5555 or email [everypoundcounts@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:everypoundcounts@lambeth.gov.uk)

## Celebrating age

Every Pound Counts joined the celebrating age event at Lambeth Town Hall on 13<sup>th</sup> October to encourage older people to contact our service for a benefit check.

We have also recently given talks and benefits checks at a number of outreach sessions at various sheltered schemes in Lambeth.

If you would like us to give a talk to older people, or to people experiencing specific health problems or disabilities, or their carers that you are working with please contact **Jualanne Hickey** on **020 7926 4713**.

## Training Opportunities



Lambeth Adults' and Community Services is currently commissioning a new schedule of training courses for the new year which will be designed to assist organisations who provide advice and to help services better identify when users are missing out.

Previous courses have been very popular so please check early in the new year for details about courses and availability of places.

The courses will cover many subject areas including:

- Introduction to Welfare benefits
- Pension Credit
- Benefits for ill or disabled people
- Benefits for People From Abroad

For more information on the training visit:

<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CommunityLiving/InformationForCareProviders/LearningDevelopmentExternalCareProviders.htm>

### December Courses Still Available:

**Welfare Benefits – Claiming Benefits for ill & disabled people - 10th Dec 2009**

**Welfare Benefits – Claiming Benefits for ill & disabled people - 11th Dec 2009**

The course covers key benefits for people who are ill and need to claim benefits because of their mental health problems. The focus will be on when and why people with mental health problems can claim benefits and ensure that course participants can identify the correct rate of DLA.

### Booking a place on this course or any future courses.

There is no charge for these courses to:

- Lambeth Council staff
- Partners in the voluntary and community sector
- Colleagues in NHS Lambeth

However, a charge of £150 will be made to applicants who book their places and then do not attend without giving prior notice of a minimum of 1 week.

You can book a place on one of the repeated courses to reserve your place. Staff in ACS can book via Oracle People.

Partners in NHS Lambeth and the voluntary and community sector are asked to complete the booking form available at:

<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CommunityLiving/InformationForCareProviders/CourseBookingForm.htm>

Send to ACS Learning and Development Training Administrator, Ti George.

If you have any queries regarding booking a place on any of these courses please contact:

Ti George  
ACS Learning and Development Training Administrator  
Phoenix House  
10 Wandsworth Road  
London, SW8 2LL  
Tel: 020 7926 4452

## 2 New Leaflets available.

- **Quick Benefits Guide**
- **Warm Homes Leaflet**



Every pound Counts have produced 2 new leaflets.

- **Quick Benefits Guide**

This provides a summary of the key benefits to help people better identify people who may be missing out. It provides details about current rates of benefit.

- **Warm Homes Leaflet**

Keeping warm in winter is an important part of keeping healthy. This leaflet provides information on how to use energy more efficiently and where to get advice on grants that can help reduce fuel bills.

Ensuring people claim all the benefits they are entitled to is an important part of helping ensure people can afford to heat their homes. The booklet provides information on services and grants available to save energy and how to get a benefit check to ensure they are not missing out.

Both leaflets are available on the Every Pound Counts section of the Lambeth website.

<http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/AdviceBenefits/Benefits/BenefitsAdvice.htm>

## Improved textphone service

DWP is replacing its old textphones in favour of new technology which allows customers with textphones to communicate with them directly through their computer network.

The new technology, called Texbox, *“means we can continue to provide telephone services to speech and hearing impaired customers that equal those provided to voice callers, both now and in the future. It will make it easier for these customers to access our services, and help us to deliver better results for them.”*, states the DWP.

They tested the Texbox system for three months in their DLA/AA helpline offices in Blackpool. One of the main advantages is that textphone callers will be able to get through, and lines will not be blocked by voice callers dialling the wrong number.

Agents will be able to answer the calls directly from their PCs, and have immediate access to computer records, which will help to speed up answers to enquiries.

The trial was evaluated by customers, staff and managers, all of whom supported the modernisation of the existing service.

The new Texbox service is scheduled to roll out later this year and DWP state that customers who contact via textphone should soon notice an improvement in services.



## Changes to On-line Services For Pensions Customers

The Pension and Disability and Carers Service (PDCCS) have changed their online services for pension-age customers to make it easier for them to access all the information they need from one place.

From the end of **September 2009**, The Pension Service website closed, and their online information and services for customers moved to [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

They state Directgov will not only contain all the information their customers need about pensions, retirement and later life, they can also get a pension forecast from the site, along with details of all other government services that they might be interested in, all in one place.

These changes are part of a big cross-government plan to make information more readily available for citizens via Directgov.

The Pension Service website also held information about employing older people. This has now moved to the ‘Employing People’ area of [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk) – a cross-

government site for employers.

Corporate and policy information about pensions has moved to: [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)

Anyone who visits The Pension Service site will be will be redirected to the appropriate place.

## Jobseeker's Allowance online

This summer, DWP launched a service on the Directgov website that enables customers to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) online. Those customers eligible for contribution based JSA can now choose to claim online.

Next year, the online service will be extended to people eligible for income based JSA.

Customers can access the service by visiting [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

Once a customer has submitted their claim a Jobcentre Plus customer service agent will telephone them to arrange a New Jobseeker's Interview.

The JSA online claims service is part of their commitment to making it easier for customers to access their services. It provides customers with a greater choice of options when contacting Jobcentre Plus, making use of a channel that many are familiar with, and offering them more convenience and control over how they interact with the service.

Further information:

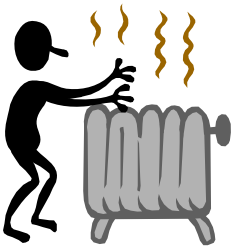
[www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

## Permitted work earnings limit

New regulations have been issued that provide for an increase in the permitted work earnings limit for incapacity related benefits purposes.

Currently the maximum amount that can be earned by a person in receipt of these benefits is limited to £92.00 per week. From **1 October 2009** this limit will increase to £93.00 per week.

## Don't lose your winter fuel payment



People over 60 should automatically get the Winter Fuel Payment without applying if they were aged 60 or over by 27 September 2009, and either:

- they got a Winter Fuel Payment last winter and they still meet the conditions for getting it
- they got State Pension or another benefit **except** Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit or Child Benefit during the week of 21–27 September 2009

However, they should call the Winter Fuel Payment helpline if:

- they have changed their bank account details
- they stop getting benefits (not including Housing Benefit, Council Tax benefit and Child Benefit)
- someone moves in, or out of their address
- there is any other change of circumstances that may affect their payment.

This will ensure they continue to get the right amount of payments.

If a partner is getting any of the following benefits then the partner will receive the Winter Fuel Payment:

- Pension Credit
- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Employment and Support Allowance (income related)

This means a person will need to apply if they don't claim benefits, don't get State

Pension, or if the only benefits they get are Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit or Child Benefit.

### **Winter Fuel Payments Helpline (part of The Pension Service)**

**Phone number**

0845 915 15 15

**Textphone**

0845 601 5613

**Opening hours**

Monday to Friday 8.30 am to 4.30 pm

**Get a claim form:**

The claim form for winter 2009/10 is now available:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Pensionsandretirementplanning/Benefits/BenefitsInRetirement/DG\\_10018657](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Pensionsandretirementplanning/Benefits/BenefitsInRetirement/DG_10018657)

## **Recent Changes to the benefit system**

### **Government concession for lone parents with disabled children**

#### **Amendment to Welfare Reform Bill agreed in the Lords**

The government has accepted an amendment to the Welfare Reform Bill which will exempt lone parents with children under the age of 16 on the lowest rate of the care component of disability living allowance (DLA) from having to engage in work-related or job-seeking activities.

Whilst the government had proposed that only those lone parents with children in receipt of the middle or higher rate of the care component would be exempt, an amendment was tabled by Baroness Thomas of Winchester during the Third Reading of the Welfare Reform Bill in the House of Lords on 22 October 2009 which led to the statement by Lord McKenzie that the government -

*'... have now decided to ensure that lone parents on income support who have a child under the age of 16 and in receipt of any rate of care component of disability living allowance will not be required to undertake work-related activities.'*

Lord McKenzie's statement removes the prospect of lone parents with disabled children having their benefit sanctioned through no fault of their own. Awards from the DLA often fluctuate between the levels of DLA, particularly in the case of children with hidden disabilities such as autism and ADHD.

DLA provides valuable protection to families facing a high risk of poverty, and it made little sense to threaten such families with benefit sanctions. The amendment will not only make families lives easier, but it will render complex new systems easier to administer.

### **Increasing the lower capital limit for Pension Credit and pension-age**

The Department for Work and Pensions has issued new guidance to local authority housing benefit departments in relation to an increase in the lower capital limit for Pension Credit and pension-age Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

The guidance advises that, from 2 November 2009 the current £6,000 lower capital limit across the three benefits, increases to £10,000.

## Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit

Some people will become newly eligible for Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit as a result of the change and should be encouraged to have their benefit entitlement checked.

## PDCS is improving the Disability Living Allowance and attendance allowance Claim Process



The Pension and Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) have improved the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA) renewal claim process.

From the end of **June 2009** they have:

- Started sending personalised renewal invitation letters to all customers including children explaining the reason for the existing award in simple terms.
- Stopped sending reminders to customers invited to renew – around 4 per cent of Helpline calls were from confused anxious customers who received unnecessary reminders 5 months and 3 months before their award ended.

From **Sept 2009** they have:

- Started to invite customers to renew 20 weeks before their award ends rather than 26 weeks.
- Introduced a new renewal claim form for AA and DLA customers in North East England, Greater Manchester and East Lancashire, which may be rolled out across the country at a later date. This shortened form addresses customer and representative complaints by:
  - replacing the existing 40-page claim form with a 4-page form;
  - making the process much simpler for people claiming due to terminal illness;
  - prompting customers to provide all relevant changes in circumstances;

Whilst also:

- Avoiding requests for information that people have already told them.
- They have introduced an interactive form to support the short claim form which they state will enable decision-makers to get focussed information by phone or by post.

In **January 2010** they will review the effects of the changes and decide whether to:

- Get more information
- Roll out the four-page renewal claim form nationally; and
- Start to invite renewals 14 weeks before the award ends rather than 20 weeks.

## Carer's Allowance Number Change

From **2 November 2009** the telephone and textphone numbers for Carer's Allowance will be changing to:

Telephone: 0845 6084321

Textphone: 0845 6045312

## Useful Websites

- [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)

- [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk)



In each edition we highlight a person who has helped us improve the quality of life of one of their service users by ensuring they do not miss out. This month's benefits hero is My Diep.

My runs a community based group for the Lambeth Elderly Association from Vietnam. My contacted the Every Pound Counts team to enquire if we would be able to offer an outreach service at the centre she manages every week. She wanted to ensure that the members of her community group had received an opportunity to check that they were receiving all of the benefits they were entitled to.

My stated "*Most of our users do not speak, read or write English. They also do not know what kind of benefits they are entitled to and how to apply for them.*"

Working alongside the Every Pound Counts adviser from one of our partner agencies, the outreach was successful in making claims for DLA, AA, and pension credit on behalf of many users. With the assistance of My, who undertook all the interpreting work to make the outreach a success, the advisor was able to make significant gains for these Lambeth residents.

The advisor secured a pension credit claim for one user increasing their weekly income by £55 per week; an annual gain of £2860.

Another user was able to get an award of DLA thus increasing their weekly income by £84.75; an annual gain of £4407.

One couple had a particularly good outcome when the husband was awarded high rate attendance allowance for the first time. His wife received an increase in her ongoing attendance allowance claim from low to high rate. This increased their weekly income by £93.60 per week. They were then able to secure an increase in their pension credit with a dual award of the severe disability premium. This increased their weekly income by a further £105.70 per week. With a further dual award of the carers' premium this couple will see a final increase in their weekly income of £258.30. This is an annual increase of £13,431.60.

My was very pleased with the work done by the advisor and stated "*we managed to apply on behalf of eight Vietnamese elderly to get high rate of AA, one DLA, Pension Credit, and four others are still waiting to hear the decision from DWP. With this extra money it is a great help to some elderly and it has made their life much easier and comfortable for the rest of their life.*"

## Benefits Hero!

**Do you know someone who needs advice and assistance? Refer them to Every Pound Counts and you might change their lives. You might also become a service hero!**

## What do you want to read? **Share your views Looking for....innovation, information, inspiration**

What would you like to see covered in future issues of ACS Update and on our intranet pages? Please send your news, views, comments, and ideas to us. Email: [jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk) Let us know what you want to see in future issues of Every Pound Counts.

We hope you found the third issue of Benefits Matters interesting and informative. Please send all feedback and contributions to Julia Harris: [jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk)